

Quick Tip: Using Movie Trailers to Teach Adjectives

by [Tamara Warhol](#)

Level: All levels

Textbooks often present adjectives as vocabulary with relatively simple grammar rules. Students learn that adjectives are used to modify nouns and about adjective placement. Movie trailers found on [YouTube](#) or [iTunes Movie Trailers](#) provide free authentic material with which instructors can create tasks to teach adjectives. Below are suggestions of tasks that use movie trailers to teach adjectives at the novice, intermediate and advanced levels. Instructors should choose a movie trailer appropriate for their audience.

Novice

Instructors may create a dictogloss activity using a movie trailer to teach novice language learners new adjectives and about adjective positions. Novice learners have limited vocabulary and grammar; their language production is usually limited to basic information about survival topics and formulaic expressions. A structured activity, such as a dictogloss, scaffolds novices so that they can learn, notice, and produce new vocabulary grammatically. In a dictogloss activity using movie trailers, instructors first teach new vocabulary and a “Focus on Form” lesson about attributive and predicate adjectives. The novices then watch a movie trailer in which the characters use the new adjectives in different positions. After showing the movie trailer once, the instructor distributes a cloze exercise (created using online tools such [edHelper](#)). The novices watch the movie trailer a second time and complete the cloze after having watched the trailer. Completing the cloze requires novices to notice and produce new adjectives in their correct grammatical positions.

Intermediate

Intermediate language learners may learn about different types of adjectives (such as comparative and superlative adjectives and participles) as well as new grammar (such as adjective gradability and order) by creating a marketing campaign for a movie based on information found in the movie trailer. Intermediate learners are able to successfully produce novel language structures by combining and recombining previously learned material with new input. Movie trailers provide this new input. Instructors play a movie trailer for students to watch, instructing the students to note new vocabulary items, particularly adjectives. The instructor asks students co-construct definitions for new vocabulary based on the context. The instructor then teaches a brief “Focus on Form” lesson about the target grammar point. In groups, students first write a brief press release using the new vocabulary and grammar. They then create an online movie poster using a website like [Posterini](#). Engaging with different media and modes, students draw upon a variety of different learning styles to produce novel adjective structures in context.

Advanced

Unlike novice and intermediate learners who do not have the same facility with the language, advanced learners may critically engage the text and content presented in a movie trailer by writing a movie review. Although errors may occur, advanced learners generally are able to provide a structured argument to support their opinions. In this task, instructors show learners a

movie trailer one or more times and ask them to take notes. The instructor then tells the students to use their notes to write a review of the movie and emphasizes the need for rich description. The latter instruction is given to prompt adjective usage. In pairs, students then read each others' reviews and provide constructive criticism about organization and grammar. The lesson concludes with a large group discussion about the students' opinions about the movie.

Movie trailers may be used across proficiency levels to teach the grammar of adjectives. Although different tasks based on movie trailers have been suggested at each level, each task may also be adapted to make them easier or more difficult.

[Tamara Warhol](#) is an Associate Professor of TESL & Linguistics and the Director of the Intensive English Program at the University of Mississippi.